

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims**

1. (Currently Amended): A method of processing starch grain material ~~for use in a fermenting process subsequently thereto, comprising the steps of:~~

~~conveying starch grain material on a belt formed of a mesh material and during at least a portion of the conveying step:~~

~~i) — irradiating microwave to the starch grain material under a dry state thereof; and~~

~~ii) — feeding hot air current through the mesh belt, such that the starch grain material is maintained at 50 to 120°C~~

a microwave irradiating step for irradiating microwave to rice grains as the starch grain material under a dry state thereof while the material is being conveyed on a belt formed of a mesh material with keeping the vicinity of the material at 50 to 120°C by means of a hot air current fed through the mesh belt,

wherein in a subsequent fermenting process, the starch grain material obtained from said microwave irradiating step is used directly as sake-brewing rice without being subjected to a water-soaking step, steaming step, liquefying step or roasting step.

2.-3. (Cancelled)

4. (Currently Amended): A method of manufacturing a fermented product, ~~comprising the steps of:~~

~~conveying starch grain material on a belt formed of a mesh material and during at least a portion of the conveying step:~~

~~i) — irradiating microwave to the starch grain material under a dry state thereof; and~~

**Response Under 37 CFR 1.116**

**Expedited Procedure**

**Examining Group 1761**

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ii) ~~feeding hot air current through the mesh belt, such that the starch grain material is maintained at 50 to 120°C;~~  
~~fermenting the starch grain material to obtain the fermented product~~  
a microwave irradiating step for irradiating microwave to rice grains as the starch grain material under a dry state thereof while the material is being conveyed on a belt formed of a mesh material with keeping the vicinity of the material at 50 to 120°C by means of a hot air current fed through the mesh belt; and  
a fermenting step for fermenting the starch grain material obtained from the microwave irradiating step, thereby to obtain the fermented product,  
wherein in the subsequent fermenting process, the starch grain material obtained from said microwave irradiating step is used directly as sake-brewing rice without being subjected to a water-soaking step, steaming step, liquefying step or roasting step.

5.-7. (Cancelled).